

# INTENTIONAL JOURNEY

Dr. L. James (Jim) Bankston

February 14, 2010

8:30 and 11:05 a.m.

*(Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday)*



## ST. PAUL'S

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## Lectionary Texts:

Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-36 (37-43)

## Luke 9:28-36

*<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.*

The Winter Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada is officially underway. Every nation there and every athlete is hopeful that something good will happen for them. The death of the luge athlete from the Republic of Georgia brought a tragic dose of reality to the beginning of the games. It is a reminder in our world that the tragic is never too far away from any of our experiences. Yet life goes on and the games go on. The beginning of every venue of the Olympic Games, Winter or Summer, is always such a positive, hopeful moment. So many of the nations of the world are gathered together for competitive games to be sure, but in peace and respect. There is that moment in which even the most cynical person must think that if it is possible for all of the peoples of the earth, representing so many different races and religions and political philosophies, to come together in peace, perhaps it is possible for us to live together in peace in our other contexts as well. We need such high and hopeful moments in our world.

And of course what we and the peoples of the world, especially our leaders, must do is to follow these high and hopeful moments with the resolve to make it happen. I still believe that some day the peoples of the world will rise up and demand it. As with so many things in life, every high and hopeful moment must be followed with resolve, commitment, and intentionality.

I need not remind you on this Valentine's Day that every loving emotion should be followed by a box of candy or a bouquet of flowers or something and that every chocolate or rose must be followed by a commitment to love and faithfulness in the often difficult vicissitudes of life. High and hopeful moments must be followed by commitment, resolve, and intentionality.

Figuratively speaking at least, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Where are those areas in your life where you need to follow your emotions with concrete actions? Our gospel reading today is about high and hopeful moments on the mountaintop that ended with an intentional journey for Jesus. From that experience, which we call the transfiguration, the disciples seem mostly confused. But Jesus came away from that experience committed to make the journey to Jerusalem. Jerusalem would mean for him increased opposition, conflict, and, rather quickly, a cross. The high and holy moment on the mountain became for Jesus a re-commitment to the calling of his life.

An emotional moment on a mountaintop was not an end in itself, but only the beginning of a significant journey. How do you translate high and hopeful moments into significant action?

In the liturgical calendar, today is the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. Lent begins this week on Ash Wednesday, and the 40-day journey through Good Friday to Easter. The word *epiphany* means revelation or manifestation. What revelation of who God is has come to you during this season of Epiphany? The season begins each year after the 12 days of Christmas on January 6. The reading for that day is always the coming of the wise men to see the Christ child in the manger in Bethlehem. Following the star, the light, the nature of God is revealed to the Gentiles, non-Jews, in the innocence and vulnerability of the child. The last reading in

the season of Epiphany is always the story of the transfiguration as we have heard today. The experience of Jesus and the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration is linked to the story of Moses on Mt. Sinai in the first two readings today. Mountains are often the place of spiritual experience and revelation in the Bible. On the mountain with Jesus, the disciples catch visions of Moses and Elijah there with them.

Moses, Elijah, Jesus all there together. Law, Prophets, and Gospel, the fullness of God is experienced. It is a mystical and holy experience for the disciples. Yet they do not fully understand it. On the mountain, and walking silently back down to the valley, they no doubt try to sort it all out. What just happened and what does it mean? The change of appearance of Jesus, the transfiguration, the vision of Moses and Elijah, the voice from heaven they were sure they heard.

Whatever happened on the mountain of transfiguration, I am willing to let it remain a mystery. I don't want to explain or explain away visions of past faith leaders or shining faces or voices from heaven. Who knows what happened there. I am more interested in what we do with high and holy moments than I am in explaining them. When John in his gospel tried to identify Jesus as the light of the world, he is content to let the metaphor stand on its own without further explanation. In the first chapter of John's gospel, he says that the light has shined in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. At least that is how it reads in our New Revised Standard Version. But you know I kind of like the way the old King James Version states it: "The light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not." To the extent that you and I are part of the darkness, sometimes when the light shines in our darkness, we comprehend it not; that is to say, we do not understand everything that happens that may be a word from God.

I'm not so concerned with how you understand or explain high and holy moments as I am what you do with them. What is a sacred moment to you may not mean anything to me, and what is deeply moving to me may not mean anything to you. Something happened on the mountain. For Jesus, the result was an intentional journey to Jerusalem. The disciples didn't know what to make of it. They thought they ought to stay on the mountain a while longer.

We are about to enter the season of Lent in which we remember again an intentional journey that ends in Holy Week and Good Friday. We'll have an opportunity to think again about our own journeys of where we go and why. We say of Jesus, "He died for our sins," by which we sometimes mean that we are all sinners, that the righteousness of God has to punish sin, but God decided to take it all out on Jesus. That's a little crude, but pretty much how we think about it.

I would hope that you would add a little to that, that you would see Jesus as more than just blindly following a script. I hope you see Jesus making an intentional journey to Jerusalem where he knew that he would be confronted by the powers that be — imperial authority and religious establishments — to give his life to confront them to be clear that the grace of God is open to all people, not just a few. He could have avoided it, but his high and holy moment led him to an intentional journey.

What are the high and holy moments of your life? And more importantly, what action or commitment does it lead you to take? To the extent that you and I are sometimes participants of the darkness or the powers that be, Jesus did die for our sins. It was an intentional journey for which he gave his life. To what are you giving your life? May the high and hopeful moments of your life lead you toward an intentional and significant journey that matters for the cause of Christ.